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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NAIROBI 004258

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SUBJECT: KENYA ELECTIONS: SWING STATES PART TWO: WESTERN  
PROVINCE TRENDING FOR THE OPPOSITION

REF: NAIROBI 4235 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Deputy Polcouns Kevin Green for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

#### Summary and Introduction

¶1. (SBU) Along with Rift Valley and the Coast, we have identified Western Province (WP) as one of Kenya's three key "swing states" in deciding the December 27 national elections. These three provinces potentially contain enough electoral votes and polling volatility to decide the election. Reftel described Rift Valley Province on October 26 as trending strongly in favor of main opposition candidate, Raila Odinga. The same October 26 polling showed Odinga similarly leading in WP at 61 percent to President Kibaki's 29 percent and, during a recent trip by Poloffs to WP, sentiments of local residents and political watchers appeared to confirm this data. Odinga and his party, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), also enjoy a similar lead in Coast Province, which will be analyzed septel. While Odinga's lead is significant both nationally and in these three provinces, two months is a long time in Kenyan politics and Kibaki and his Party of National Unity (PNU) have recently begun to make up ground.

¶2. (C) WP is home to a grouping of approximately 16 different Bantu speaking people, known collectively as the Luhya. "Luhya Unity" is an oft talked about but seldom achieved political goal for the area's leaders. With 14 percent of the national population, and 9 percent of likely voters, the Luhya electorate is heavily courted, nonetheless. There is, moreover, a definite North-South divide in WP. The more numerous southern Luhya sub-groups, bordering and intermingled with the Luos of Nyanza Province are staunchly in favor of Odinga and ODM, whereas the northern Luhya were evenly split between the opposition and Kibaki, Poloffs heard during their visit. Kibaki plainly trailed Odinga in campaign infrastructure but had teams of GOK officials on the ground promoting his government's initiatives, we observed. More worrying, there were also GOK officials in WP engaged in blatant, public vote-buying, as personally witnessed by Poloffs. Other than the enthusiasm we observed surrounding that unfortunate event, there seemed to be a real lack of energy or direction among Kibaki supporters in WP but, again, we expect that to change as Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU) finds its feet and the President continues to bring the resources of his office to bear in the province and

elsewhere. One wild card in WP is how the ODM's campaign plank of "majimbo" or federalism plays out. The benign version is devolution of resources to the provinces, but in the violence-racked region of Mt. Elgon, for example, majimboism's potential ethnic-exclusivist dark side has reared its head and frightened voters. End summary and introduction.

#### Background on WP

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¶3. (SBU) The WP is one of Kenya's seven provinces in addition to Nairobi. Along with neighboring Nyanza Province, it is a small, densely populated area tucked between the Rift Valley and Uganda. WP is home to a grouping of approximately 16 different Bantu speaking people, known collectively as the Luhya. The most important point about the Luhya is that they are not a single, homogenous tribe. They have been bestowed the status of a separate entity simply because they are distinct from the Nilotic speaking Luo of Nyanza to the south (Odinga's tribe), the Nilotic speaking Kalenjin to the east and north, and Ugandan Tesso to the west. Within the Luhya there are variations in dialect, ritual, economic pursuits, culture and, most importantly for election analysis, politics.

¶4. (SBU) "Luhya Unity" is an oft talked about but seldom achieved political goal for the area's leaders. With 14 percent of the national population, the Luhya vote is heavily courted (note, however, that given current voter registration and past voter turn-out rates, Luyhas comprise only 9 percent of likely voters). Both government and opposition factions claim significant support from various Luhya sub-groups. The

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Luhya, accordingly, divided their vote during the 2005 draft constitution referendum. Most Luhya constituencies opposed the government's draft while the Bukusu sub-group of the Luhya, who live in the northern district of Bungoma, stood behind favorite son Trade Minister Kituyi in his support for the government draft. (Note: The Bukusu's party, FORD-K, indeed, is a part of the PNU coalition. End note) The Luhya, furthermore, do not have the Kamba's close historical ties to President Kibaki's Kikuyu tribe. They have been culturally influenced by their more homogeneous neighbors, the Luos; traditional political rivals of the Kikuyu and steadfast supporters of favorite son, Raila Odinga. Thus the Luhya are considered less reflexively pro-Bantu than are other Bantu groups, and more open to cooperation with the Luo.

¶5. (C) There is a definite North-South divide in WP. The more numerous southern Luhya sub-groups, bordering and intermingled with the Luos of Nyanza Province are staunchly in favor of Odinga and ODM. The term we heard when traveling in southern WP was that its residents have been "Luo-ized." Odinga's vice-presidential running mate, Musaila Mudavadi, hails from one of the south's most developed constituencies, Sabatia. Deputy Provincial Commissioner Claire Omolo (ethnic Luo) explained that even in the less populated northern WP, Kibaki was only splitting the vote 50/50. Conversations we had in markets, truck stops, and at political rallies traveling due-north through WP certainly confirmed this political divide, but the starkest contrast between the two regions -- and one of the best explanations for ODM's current lead in Luhya-land -- occurred at an unmarked intersection in the middle of sitting Vice-President Moody Awori's district, Funyula. There the grass huts and hard-scrabble dirt trails we had traveled north abruptly met a modern highway. Subsistence farms and grinding poverty immediately gave way to offices and agri-business, as the highway soon led us directly past the expansive, four-story estate of the Vice-President. While there were legitimate complaints of poor roads and lack of rural electrification throughout the province, the universal perception in south WP was that Kibaki and Awori had left the southern region to rot. Comments we heard sharing lunch with village elders in south

Funyula were especially bitter and revenge-minded regarding the Vice-President. There is a distinct possibility that Awori will not be returned to office regardless of whether Kibaki rebounds in WP. Mudavadi, on the other hand, was winning votes for Odinga, particularly because Odinga has publicly promised to leave office after one term in favor of a Mudavadi presidency. (Comment: A testament to the potential importance of WP to the election is that all three major candidates have drawn their vice-presidential nominee from there, with ODM-K presidential candidate Kalonzo Musyoka selecting perennial Awori challenger, Julia Ojiambo, to complete the trifecta. End comment.)

#### The Louis Otieno Show

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¶6. (SBU) The "throw the bums out" vibe in WP was palpable during the live, nationally televised broadcast of Kenya's newly popular "Louis Otieno Live," which was shooting in the province's capital city, Kakamega, during our visit. Poloffs sat in the back of a studio audience that was openly hostile and derisive of the three government ministers participating as panelist on the show: Minister of State Moses Akaranga, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Moses Wetangula, and Minister of Trade and Industry Mukhisa Kituyi. The three ministers are also sitting MPs from the province and faced tough questioning and commentary from an enthusiastic crowd of their constituents who had all come to discuss the topic of the evening, corruption. "Louis Otieno Live" is produced by the UN to promote issues-based campaigning, but is funded almost entirely by USAID. This was the fifth episode in this popular series.

¶7. (SBU) In a conversation with Poloffs over breakfast the next morning, Otieno agreed with our senior political FSN that the mood of the crowd indicated that very few of the MPs from WP will be re-elected. He noted that the stunned look on many panelists faces came from never having interacted with their constituents on a level playing field and in front of a national audience.

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#### Kibaki's Team Descend on WP

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¶8. (SBU) President Kibaki may have waited too late to win WP, we heard from his campaign manager in nearby Kitale, Joseph Wanyama. Bright orange ODM campaign headquarters dotted the WP country-side. We did not see a single PNU building. Wanyama remarked that Kibaki supporters had been hamstrung by the President's failure to form a coalition party or announce his candidacy until September 16. PNU trailed ODM in organization, campaign infrastructure and name recognition, he complained.

¶9. (SBU) The Kibaki team, nonetheless, has become focused on winning WP, we observed. In addition to the ministerial level participation in the television event, we ran into Under-Secretary for Energy K. Adigala, Permanent Secretary for Justice Dorothy Angote, Lands Department Office Director Waithaka, and Director of e-Government Juma, who were all in Kakamega to promote Kibaki's Vision 2030. They were next on their way to the politically volatile Mt. Elgon region for the same purpose. We had also met a similar team touring the Rift Valley the day before headed by Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Local Government Solomon Boit and were told that many such groups were traveling Kenya drumming up support for a second Kibaki administration.

¶10. (C) We then learned of a rally in support of PNU aspirant and sitting MP Ruth Oniang'o taking place in the nearby town of Butere. Poloffs arrived in time to see a red helicopter carrying Minister of Local Government (and FORD-K Party Chief) Musikari Kombo and Assistant Minister of Energy Mwagi Kiunjuri land at the tented rally grounds. They were

at the campaign event to apportion money to local residents. A master of ceremonies first recognized an assortment of community self-help groups over a public address system and detailed how much money each had raised. The total amount was 27 million shillings. The GOK officials then pledged to match that amount, ostensibly with their own funds. That such thinly disguised vote buying by Kibaki cabinet members went on at an actual campaign rally in the full view of visiting USG officials did not seem to bother anyone or dampen the enthusiastic mood. Publicity was the point, obviously, and the theater of swooping down in the red helicopter to deliver the cash succeeded as a real crowd pleaser.

#### The Dark Face of Majimbo in Mt. Elgon

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¶11. (SBU) While a detailed analysis of ODM's campaign plank of "majimbo" or federalism will follow septel, Kibaki supporters' concerns that devolution of power may be used to justify tribal violence and land grabs appear justified in light of what happened in Mt. Elgon during our visit. On October 20, Sabao Liberation Forces (SLF) killed a local chief who had sought to pacify the clan-based violence that has turned the district into a no-go zone. In a meeting with local journalists and political activists, we were told that under the banner of majimbo the SLF were escalating their attacks in advance of what they hope will be an Odinga victory. They want a head start on running off Luhya and other "foreigners" from Mt. Elgon, we heard. Six people were beheaded by the SLF for the same purpose on October 28, as the violence continues.

¶12. (SBU) Elsewhere in WP people were not interpreting majimbo in such a radical, violent manner, but ordinary citizens throughout the district expressed a great deal of confusion over what majimbo meant. Person after person we met expressed hope that ODM would do a better job of explaining this concept.

Comment

¶13. (C) Other than the enthusiasm we observed surrounding the cash give away at the campaign rally in Butere, there seemed to be a real lack of energy or direction among Kibaki supporters in WP. It is a good sign for the President that

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his troops are now out in force and, one suspects, the race in WP should tighten as Kibaki continues to bring the apparatus and resources of government to bear in the province. While this region still appears to be Odinga's to lose, majimbo is a definite wild card here. In fact, recent polling shows that 44 percent of those surveyed nationally do not support majimbo, with 38 percent in favor. Kibaki may get traction hammering Odinga on the majimbo issue, especially near areas like Mt. Elgon where people may become alarmed that this campaign plank is being used to justify violence. End comment.

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